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ABSTRACT

To help committed student writers make the transition from school-sponsored to self-sponsored forms of discourse, an advanced expository writing course combines student-chosen writing assignments with a pedagogical structure that promotes a sensitive and critical response to prose. The class is organized into writing groups containing four or five students each. Every week students take turns giving two readings of three or four pages of new, finished prose. Following the second reading, all group members comment on their responses to the words, tone, organization, and argument of each paper. To increase motivation and provide guidelines for peer evaluations, the teacher listens to and critiques one paper per group every week and offers a quick evaluation of group effectiveness. Writing groups are effective because they (1) consolidate four essential components of rhetorical study--writing, reading, speaking, and listening; (2) encourage writer ownership through self-generated assignments; (3) inspire rising expectations among peer readers; (4) improve the writer's sense of sound and rhythm through oral reading; (5) help listeners develop short-term memory skills; (6) merge audience and writer, subject and response; and (7) show students the value of revising. (An introduction to the course, writing group guidelines, and advice to writers and listeners are appended.) (MM)

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THE UN-ASSIGNMENT: WRITING GROUPS FOR ADVANCED EXPOSITORY WRITERS

What distinguishes Advanced Expository Writing from Intermediate and Freshman courses? What does the advanced writing student need to learn? According to most teachers--not much. The most commonly held attitude toward writing is that such courses advance the student by asking for more of the same. Thus Advanced Expository Writing is simply Intermediate Expository Writing writ one more time. No substantial emphasis is shifted, no adjustment is made to students who ought, supposedly, to be doing something better or harder or qualitatively and quantitatively different.

Another less commonly held view is that Advanced Expository Writing represents a more specialized course, one which requires students to work within narrower rhetorical constraints. Students here might be asked to master Business Writing or Feature Writing. And although there is some good reason to offer such courses, they often preclude certain students who want a more generalized course within which they can hone their abilities without committing themselves to a particular specialization or genre.

One answer, I think, to this problem is to re-orient our notions, to shift our thinking away from the writing and toward the writer. Naturally all teachers want the writing to improve, want the course to be a step forward in the students' progression toward compositional excellence. But this cannot be achieved by making assignments harder or more obscure, nor

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necessarily by demanding an increased specialization. What has to happen is for the students to internalize what it means to be a writer. The Advanced Writing students have to make a commitment to the writing that transcends the course and the college. Those students have to learn somehow to inhabit their writing, to claim it as their own. In Janet Emig's terms, they have to make the transition from school-sponsored to self-sponsored forms of discourse.[1]

Most writing classes do not allow students to possess their own writing; it is, instead, possessed by the teacher, the school, the institution. Given an assignment that does not work, that nets a harsh comment or poor grade, the students can disclaim responsibility: the idea was not theirs. They have been invited to a party not their own; if the food is bad and the talk dull, they can simply sidle out the side door and head home.

But if the students are given no assignment--none, that is, except to produce the best writing they can--then immediately something more is at stake. If such writing tarnishes in the hand, one cannot blame some shadowy wizard standing remotely at the front of the room. In such a situation, one is one's own alchemist, the success or failure of transforming lead into gold is purely one's own measure. Such a course forces writers to lay claim to their writing, to assume full responsibility for what it means to be a writer. Combined with a pedagogical structure for insuring detailed, intensive response to their work along with training them to become close, critical readers of prose, what emerges is a course that can truly be identified as Advanced Expository Writing.

My method for achieving this end is writing groups. To them students bring their writing each week. In them they both give and receive a sur-

prising wealth of comment, suggestion, criticism, praise. I realize that writing groups, of one sort or another, are not new, that they are used extensively by the Bay Area Writing Project, and that Peter Elbow has described them in Writing Without Teachers.[2] But Elbow's description is too vague and overly flexible to be of help to the classroom teacher. Nor has anyone explored the possibilities such a pedagogy possesses for the classroom or the reasons such groups work. My intention in the remainder of this essay is to present just such a blend of pedagogical description and theoretical surmise as to how and why these writing groups have proven so successful for class after class of my advanced expository writers.

I set up the groups during the first week of class, putting four or five students in each. Usually my enrollments accommodate such an organization; with twenty to twenty-five students, I can create four or five groups with four to five students in each. In each group I try to include: men and women, preferably two of each; younger and older students; stronger and weaker writers, bold and hesitant speakers--that is, a considerable blend of personalities and ability levels. Groups generally thrive on diversity. To help me determine these factors, I ask each student during the first week to give a short, oral "writer's biography" by way of introduction; I also ask to see a representative writing sample. If I guess wrong about some individuals so that a group becomes too passive or works at too low a level of response, I can still switch members betwen groups--if I do it by the second or third meeting. Seldom do members wish to be switched after three weeks, primarily because they develop intense group loyalty.

Starting with the second week, each student is required to bring three to four pages (five to seven handwritten) of finished prose to the group meeting each week. The students choose their own subjects. My role in this respect is purely advisory: I meet with those individuals having difficulty finding something to write about, and through half an hour's conversation we usually uncover a number of possibilities. As to what they finally choose and how they treat it, the final determinations are made by the students themselves. They must do this--if they are to learn how to claim sovereignty for themselves as writers.[3]

The writing that the students finally produce should be at a stage where the writer feels comfortable about reading it to the other members, but is still committed to reworking and improving it. The writing should exist as a prototype--ready to be tried out on the test field or in the wind tunnel, but not yet ready to carry passengers over the long haul. One of the writing group's greatest virtues is its usefulness in encouraging and even compelling revision and further experimentation. The writer must therefore be open to suggestion.

The students arrive on the day of the first meeting with their writing and a pad of notepaper. They arrange themselves in a rough circle, and one student volunteers to read first. Thereafter the pattern is set: A reads; B, C, and D respond. Then B reads, and C, D, and A respond. The next week, B reads first and so on through the weeks. Students should always sit in the same order so that there is never any question--or embarrassment--as to who reads first after the first day. One of the virtures of the writing group is that once started, it runs on automatic for the remainder of the school term.

The activity within each group is as follows: The first student reads her essay aloud while the rest of the group listens. The listeners take no notes, write nothing down. Their one responsibility is to listen and experience the first reading. They do not see the piece being read, for if they had it before them the process would change to one of reading rather than listening. After the first oral presentation of the essay there is a short pause (of 30 seconds or so) during which the listeners may make brief notes concerning their responses. Then the writer reads aloud a second time--the same three to four pages. This time the other members write down all their responses--to words, to tone, organization, argument, to their own interest or lack of it, to how they feel and what they think and how they react. After the second reading, the student to the left of the writer offers his response and so on successively around the group. During this time the writer says nothing but takes notes on comments and otherwise absorbs the response. When everyone has responded, the next person begins reading and so on until everyone has read and received a response from each member of the group.

To help my students perform well as writers and respondents, I give them three pages of suggestions. I include them here as an appendix. They represent a hortatory blueprint, a rough set of shared procedures and principles. But the guidelines alone do not suffice. The success of a writing group class inevitably depends upon the interaction of the teacher as respondent and role model, especially since most students do not know how to comment honestly and constructively on the writing of their peers. For the teacher, as well, writing group responses differ from the usual evaluatory comments written in the margins of student essays. The purpose of a

group response is neither to justify a grade nor to focus a grim editorial bombsight on awkwardness and error. Instead, its intent is to describe the ways in which a piece of writing works and fails to work so that the writer can, if she chooses, go back and revise.

To comment in this way takes experience, but even instructors without previous group work will find their responses rich and fruitful because of the reading, writing, and critiquing they have logged in over the years. My technique is to give both "macro" and "micro" responses--that is, to focus on certain overall elements (development, tone, argument, syntactical patterns) as well as specifics (word choice, phrasing, rhythm, images). I always try to balance positive and negative statements, using this same shorthand of pluses and minuses after my comments as reference points. During the first reading, I function as a blotter, absorbing every word as it is spoken off the page. During the second reading, I write continuously, noting words and phrases so that I can refer the writer to particular points in his essay. Surprisingly, I find I need those references myself. The short-term memory is often shorter than one suspects.

My oral response to the writer usually consists of a few overall impressions followed by a serial reading of my manically scribbled notes. I try to be encouraging, but not falsely so, telling the writer both what I think and what I feel--directly, honestly, personally. During the first three to four weeks, I respond last, not to have the final word, but to give the students more room to respond since my comments tend to be extensive. Otherwise, the students often tailor their reactions to suit mine. One lesson they need to learn to is trust their own intuitive and

critical judgments. After four or so weeks of group work, it no longer matters in what order I respond; the students have ceased to define me as the fount of compositional wisdom, even though they still naturally pay heed to my comments.

Before leaving the group, I offer a quick general critique of the group members. My most frequent task is to urge them to be more specific, honest, direct, and intuitive. I urge them over and over to locate their responses specifically so that the writer knows exactly where something is happening. Perhaps the best advice I give them is that if they find nothing to criticize they are in essence telling the writer to mail the article to The New Yorker. Likewise, if they find nothing to praise, they are telling the writer to become a house-painter. Somewhere between the two extremes is the balance I am looking for.

During the first half of the course, this participation in each group is essential. My comments and critiques set ambitious expectations. My presence underscores a strong commitment to the process. My participation as respondent and sometimes--if time and my own subject matter allow--as writer contributes to the collaborative relationship that develops between the students and me throughout the quarter. Later on, I can come just to observe or, as my conferencing time with individual students increases, skip a group altogether, though I hate to do this for the signal it may send to the students.

I describe the process in such detail because it is difficult to start writing groups from scratch. Once begun, however, they are almost self-perpetuating. I have enough veterans now that I can invite previous

students to model a writing group for my new class on the second or third day. The experienced students love to show off their skill at responding and afterwards to speak about the benefits of this way of writing. Their expertise and excitement begin the class in rousing fashion.

Writing group classes need special planning by the teacher. For one writer to read twice and hear everyone's response takes 20 to 30 minutes; writing group classes therefore require two-hour blocks of time. Given the intensity of the activity, each group usually requires its own room so that they do not distract one another. Once a week the students also need to come together as a class. Such meetings allow us to feel our collective pulse--to hear general discussion on the group process, to discuss topics of common interest, and, as soon as possible, to edit student essays that have emerged out of the groups. Oral readings alone do not suffice; important as they are, essays are intended finally to be read.

Grading such a class has never proven to be a problem. I tell my students early that their final grade will be based on the best 10-12 pages they produce during the term. Among those pages I would like at least one completed essay of five pages or more. In addition, I place considerable value on attendance and contributions to the group. Midway through the course, I offer students a graded evaluation. At the end of the term, I ask the students to describe the experience of the groups in an essay for me--evaluating their own performance and the contributions of the other members in their groups. These responses help me to understand what has happened in the groups during my absence.

So much for the pedagogical underpinnings of writing groups. If we grant that they work, and this can be borne out by classroom practice, then

a significant question emerges: what accounts for their success? Why are they worth the time and trouble? There are, I think, a number of answers, some of which have implications about the teaching of writing beyond this particular classroom strategy.

First of all, and perhaps most important, writing groups consolidate into one process the four essential components of rhetorical study: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Andrea Lunsford, during her keynote address at the 1983 Wyoming Conference, advocated just such a reintegration of Speech and English.[4] Her argument was that writing specialists must create a discipline informed by the eighteenth-century model so that rhetoric can reclaim its interdisiplinary base. Writing groups operate from just such a premise. They are holistic in the best sense of the word. Writing, reading, speaking, listening--the four activities are brought together in a focused and purposeful way that almost guarantees an improvement in a student's verbal and compositional well-being.

Within the context of the writing groups, each of these activities takes on a special significance. The activity of writing, first of all, differs from that in most traditional classes for two reasons. First, it is self-sponsored; that is, it belongs to the student, who must accept both responsibility for its faults and gratification for its virtues. As stated earlier, that kind of sovereignty is a crucial factor in process courses like composition. The students come to claim their writing in a way that makes them particularly earnest about what they do and how they do it. Just as importantly, the writing is read to peers, who are also producing writing of their own. Peer pressure creates a spiral effect; week after

week the students inevitably push their expectations upward, while simultaneously helping each other to achieve them. They also expand their expositional horizons by hearing the varied essays and interests composed by their classmates. Almost always, they come to appreciate styles and subjects that were initially unappealing, enlarging their own repertoire of possibilities. Such an expansion of mind is one of those essential tenets of a liberal education, and it lies at the heart of the revitalized enterprise of Rhetoric that Lunsford described.

The reading--in this case, the reading aloud--is also crucial. Reading aloud, in and of its own sake, is a positive experience for writers, one which improves their sense of sound and rhythm. Once they overcome their initial embarrassment, students come to enjoy these readings, even to take pride in the sound of their own language. More significantly, as a former member of my own writing group recently told me, "Reading aloud is a form of editing. You hear things that you skip over in the silent reading. And you have to be concerned with the responses of your audience; you hear the piece through them, you observe their physical responses, hear their laughter, see the glazed expression, feel the approval or disapproval." Reading one's writing aloud is one of those lost practices that needs to be reintroduced into the composition classroom. In my recent research with published writers of non-fiction, I found that they all affirmed the importance of this practice. John McPhee, for example, was adamant about its value. When I asked him if he read his work aloud, he replied, "Every word." Asked if read to himself, he elaborated:

> "I have to have an audience. My poor audience is my wife who is a very good listener . . . she's a reader . . she reads

> widely and she--thank the Lord--is willing to sit and listen to me when I come home once or twice a week or whenever it is with a little segment that I have completed. I'll read it before we have dinner, and in that way I release myself from it. And I hear it, and I make changes as a result of the reading. But absolutely all of this is aural--"a-u" aural. I wouldn't publish ten words that hadn't been read aloud. Absolutely everything that I have written has been read aloud to someone at least once. And of course the person who is listening most closely is I. But it is meant to be read aloud. Whether it actually is or not, it is meant to be both oral and aural. . . . It is meant to be heard in the ear."[5]

Richard Selzer and Maxine Hong Kingston likewise read all their work aloud before publishing it. All of these successful writers need to hear the language in the ear, to hear the poetry of it (or the lack of it) before committing themselves in print. The reading aloud is, therefore, an essential aspect of writing groups.

So is the listening. Each time I institute writing groups, at least one or two students during the first week insist that the essays should be read silently by each group member. "After all," they say quite logically, "these essays will not be read aloud by real readers in the real world." True, but the writing group does not imitate the world; it creates a focused and structured environment within which essential verbal abilities can be improved. Listening to someone read a three to four page selection from an essay on silicon chip technology strains the mind in healthful ways. It improves the short-term memory, thereby enlarging our verbal attention span. It forces us to listen to (and for) voice, tone, rhythm, repetition. It reawakens in us a renewed awareness that language is oral and aural--that even in print it achieves effects through an implied "soundfulness." And--if the piece is well-crafted--it is a pleasure to hear someone else weave thought and language together. I often think that it is the listening--the close attention to hearing language spoken--that allows writing groups to achieve their most important and lasting effects.

Finally there is speaking. Most formally trained speech teachers might well scoff at the low level of oral activity that occurs in the groups. Clearly it is not intended to replace formal training in Oral Delivery. But they would agree, I think, that such activity pays useful dividends. Speaking about the writing forces students to verbalize complicated and impalpable notions about rhythm, connotation, tone. (What, in this very sentence, is the effect of that initial prepositional phrase?) As Janet Emig has so persuasively stated, verbalizing concepts helps us to know and remember them. What we can put into words gains value as something we can apply conceptually. Additionally, speaking makes all the students into more active participants. No one in the groups can sit back and passively listen or tune out altogether. Each must become an active and contributing member, a role underscored and encouraged by their activity as speakers.

At the heart of this process I am describing is something so essentially rhetorical that it constitutes the heart of the communications triangle--namely, the interactive nature of language. Writing groups merge the writer with an audience, the subject of an essay with its response. They force an interaction between and among writer, reader, subject, and language, creating an environment in which various sympathetic and opposing forces (the writer's intention, the reader's response, the incalcitrance of the word) produce that verbal synthesis we call a text, with all its complications, possibilities, and richness of meaning. To apply the term adopted by the Russian linguist and literary theorist, Mikahil Bakhtin,

the interaction in such an environment is "dialogic."[6] What the students gain from all this is an enriched understanding of the rhetorical forces at work in language, the contingencies that always operate upon any act of speaking or writing. And they learn this through a collaborative process that reinforces the bonds between speakers and listeners, writers and readers.

As an inevitable part of this active exchange, the students also learn the value of revising. One of the most complex skills that instructors must teach is how to revise, how to educate students to be their own best readers. In a conventional composition class, only finished essays are usually examined by class and teacher, making revision something that gets tagged on drearily, if ever, at the end of the writing process. But writing groups encourage students to bring in parts of essays, second and third drafts, tentative possibilities. As the participants learn to respond closely and critically to other group members' writing each week, they are in essence giving a wealth of suggestion for revising. Week after week, each member performs this function until they all become sensitive, critical readers of each other's work. Ultimately this ability turns inward, toward their own compositions so that they become their own first readers. They learn to anticipate response, to hear the reactions of their writing group members even before they occur. Even the most practiced writer still needs other readers, of course, but writing groups do help students learn to read with an eye toward revision.

Finally, there is a very practical reason writing groups work: they are portable. Most composition clases create teacher-dependent students who have difficulty functioning independently once the instructor has

departed. Writing group students, on the other hand, initiate subjects, write, read, and revise--all largely on their own within the structure of the writing groups. And, unlike the student who cannot carry the teacher away, writing group students can form subsequent groups and sustain them for as long as writing is important to them. A number of my most committed students have done just that.

Although my enthusiasm may suggest otherwise, I am aware that writing groups are no panacea. They demand considerable nurturing on the part of the instructor who must also be willing, in part, to give over his or her role as authoritative expert to the students. They depend upon the commitment of the students, many of whom have never had to assume this kind of responsibility for their own work. They emphasize the aurality of language and necessarily de-emphasize the finished written product, at least in the workings of the groups.[7] But with all that said, I still believe writing groups to be the best method I have discovered for teaching advanced expository writers. Nearly all my students have agreed, a fact I know by reading their anonymous written evaluations. I would like to end by quoting just one such evaluation by a student who described his recent experience in Advanced Expository Writing:

> "For once, the opportunity of writing was put in a positive light. No more generic three page papers, typed, double-spaced, dealing with a professor's bland topics. I liked the limitless guidelines we were given with non-fictional themes. I came away from our class meeting time with a desire to sit down and write. At first, I was ambivalent about the writing groups--how good are these other writers? how will mine compare? Through the quarter, though, I developed a need to expose my writing to others for an outsider's constructive criticism, someone who knew nothing about the piece, but could generate useful feedback that would make for easily understood

> revisions, The opinions that the others gave became a useful set of guidelines to improve my own pieces and I value these opinions with high regard. The writing group has become very valuable to me.

They have, of course, also become very valuable to me. I hope that more of my colleagues who teach such courses will try writing groups for themselves.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Emig was one of the first to distinguish between self-sponsored and school-sponsored forms of discourse among writing students. See The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1971). Emig compares the two kinds of writing and asserts that "(1) No student in the same has experienced a curriculum or a set of school-sponsored experiences in composition in which peer interactions play any formal part as, say, in reciprocal reading and evaluating of themes by pairs or groups. (2) Peers play a very significant role in self-sponsored writing of the twelfth graders in this sample," (p. 78). The pedagogy I describe fuses these two kinds of writing into one mode.

2. See Peter Elbow, Writing without Teachers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), Chs. 4 and 5, esp. pp. 78-79, 84-106. My greater debt, in this respect, however is to Professor Roger Whitlock, Director of Freshman Composition, University of Hawaii, who first introduced me to writing groups by inviting me to be in his. The experience changed the way I write and the way I teach. I am still a member of that original writing group which has been meeting now for more than four and a half years.

3. I am thinking here of "sovereignty" in Walker Percy's terms, as a claiming of thought and experience for oneself. Percy asserts that "If we look into the ways in which the student can recover the dogfish (or the sonnet) [that is, any educational experience], we will see that they have in common the stratagem of avoiding the educator's direct presentation of

the object as a lesson to be learned and restoring access to sonnet and dogfish as beings to be known, reasserting the sovereignty of knower over known," in The Message in the Bottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954, 1979), p. 59. Writing groups compel students to claim the writing experience on their own terms, and thus they help them discover their own power as students and writers.

4. Professor Lunsford delivered her remarks at the Opening Sessions of the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English in Laramie, Wyoming on 27 June 1982. Her paper will, I am sure, soon find its way into print.

5. Taped interview, 22 June 1983. I am extremely indebted to the University of Washington for its award of a Graduate School Research Fund stipend which allowed me to pursue my research.

6. As Bakhtin states "The word, breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others, is able, in this dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone." See Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 277.

7. Very little, either pro or con, has been written about using writing groups in the classroom. See Richard Gebhardt, "Teamwork and Feedback: Broadening the Base of Collaborative Writing," College English, 42, 1 (September 1980), 69-74; and Martha A. Fisher and Joan Hocking, "The Writing

Workshop: Boon or Bane of the Composition Classroom?," Freshman English News, 10, 2 (Fall, 1981), 17-20. Both essays are helpful, but neither focuses on the virtues of using writing groups in advanced expository writing classes.

Appendix

I. Introduction to Advanced Expository Writing

Here is how the course will work. Each week, you must have 3-4 1/2 pages of written work which is ready to be read and responded to. You cannot have less than three or more than four and a half (or you will not be able to get a true response from your group members).

The class will form itself into groups with 4 or 5 members each. The groups will meet beginning next Tuesday afternoon from 1:30-3:30, and every Tuesday thereafter until the end of the quarter. The most intense work of the course will be done in the 2-hour group sessions. They are essential. To miss them is to miss the course. The grade at the end of the course will reflect attendance and participation in these sessions. Each session missed will drop you half a grade or more. If you miss three of these session, I will ask you either to drop the course or accept a failing grade for the quarter.

You must also attend class every Thursday 1:30-3:30 in our room in Parrington Hall. In these sessions we will conduct the administrative business of the class and edit various written work by the writers in English 421. Attendance at these classes is mandatory; they represent the only time we will all be together to talk about writing. They will also help us make the adjustments to the groups and allow us to read some of the work being produced in the groups. The editing sessions on Thursdays have, in the past, proven of enormous benefit to the writers in this class.

All this is hard-line talk, mostly because the course depends on a strong commitment. If you think you will have trouble attending or writing the required amount, then you should not stay in the course. Students from my previous 400 level writing course will attest to the difficulty involved.

On October 22nd, I will ask everyone to submit 4-6 finished pages to me. On November 12th, I will ask for an additional 4-6 pages. At the end of the quarter, I will ask that you submit 10-14 finished pages total on which you want to base the writing-performance part of your grade. What you give me does not have to be complete--that is, it might be the first 9 pages of a 30 page feature on "Diseases of the Rhododendron Bulb." Or it might be a 6 page essay and the first pages of 4 as yet unfinished pieces. But the writing itself must be finished, or as finished as you can get it with your group's help. THERE WILL BE NO INCOMPLETES.

I will comment as extensively as I can on your writing both when I hear it read in the group and when you give it to me for a specific response.

But the most valuable comments should always be coming from your group. If the group does not operate as it should, if there is some problem or other, then someone (or everyone) in the group should let me know. If someone is not bringing writing each week or is not responding properly or is violating the format, then the group should tell me so that we can get the procedure back on track. If the instructions are followed, the writing groups will be valuable, enjoyable, productive. They do depend on good will and true grit.

No weekly writing will be graded. At mid-quarter, I will give you a rough approximation of your grade based on the writing I have seen and heard, your contributions to your group as respondent, and your participation and attendance in the Thursday sessions. At the end of the quarter, in addition to the writing you hand in, you will be encouraged to describe your group--how it worked, who helped you most, how you feel that you contributed, what you accomplished during the quarter. This statement will help me to establish how the course has worked for you.

One last note: During the quarter, you must read at least two revisions of work already heard by your group. Students in past classes have specifically requested this so that they can see how their comments are affecting the writer (and the writing).

When you are ready to have something of yours edited at a Thursday session, please give it to me for dittoing. Do not be hesitant; the Thursday sessions will really help your writing. I need to start receiving copy by the 3rd week.

Good luck.

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II. Some Guidelines for Setting Up a Writing Group

1. You need four or five committed writers.

2. Participants should want to increase the amount and improve the quality of their own writing. They must be willing to make a firm commitment to meet every week for at least two hours in their group. They must also agree to bring a new or revised piece of writing each week. The group cannot work unless each member participates as both writer and respondent every week.

3. Kinds of writing. Since this is an Expository Writing Class, we must limit ourselves to non-fictional prose. In the past, we have seen analytical essays, critical articles, arguments, book and movie reviews, personal letters, autobiographies, descriptions of people, processes, objects--almost anything as long as it belongs essentially to that category known as non-fictional prose.

4. It usually takes about 20-30 minutes for a writer to read twice and then hear the other participants respond. Groups may want to set up a time-keeper who will enforce limits so that every individual gets to both read and respond. No one should ever be skipped.

5. The group works best if each member sits in the same place each week. The person who reads first one week should be the last person to read the next week. Response should start to the left of the writer.

6. At some point during the quarter, each member of the group is required to read at least two revisions of pieces that the group has responded to. Previous writing group classes have found that they like to hear the ways in which their responses have made a difference in their group members' writing.

7. At the end of the quarter, you will be required to turn in your best 10-12 pages. Among these pages should be at least one completed essay of 4-5 pages in length. Your pages may be one long essay, or the first 10 pages of a book, or one essay plus seven first pages of essays as yet uncompleted. The writing grade of the course will be based upon what you turn in. WARNING: Although 10 pages does not sound like much, do not be lulled into a false confidence. Most writing group students have difficulty producing 10 excellent pages at the end of the quarter.

III. Advice to the Writer

1. Read a piece that is somewhere between three and four-and-a-half typewritten pages.

2. Do not spend time introducing the piece you are going to read. Do not explain anything about its composition. Do not apologize for it. Do not say what kinds of responses you are looking for. The temptation, especially at first, will be very strong to do any or all of these things. You will want to say, "I did not have very much time to write this week, and so . . ." Don't say it. If you do, you will color your listeners' responses to your words. Say only what is necessary to help your group understand the piece, that is, "This is the second section of the essay I started reading last week" or "This is a revision of the "carpet" essay you heard two weeks ago."

3. Read the writing slowly enough so that your listeners can take it in. And read it loudly enough so that they can hear it clearly. Wait 30 seconds or so between the first and second readings to allow your listeners time to write down a few impressions.

4. When the members of the group give you their responses, just listen. You will probably be tempted to defend something you have said or to explain it or to justify it. Resist the temptation. Say nothing. It is your responsibility to listen. It may help if you write down responses for use later when you revise. Even when questioned directly about a word, a citation, whatever--say nothing. Any response on your part can--and probably will--color the responses you receive from your listeners, thereby making them less valuable.

5. Elbow tells the writer: "Don't try to understand what people tell you . . . But do try to understand HOW they tell it to you." Some respondents say more in tone and gesture than they do in words. Take in their whole response. See what you can make of it in your mind and in your writing.

IV. Advice to Listeners

1. Take no notes the first time a piece is read. Do not even put a pen or pencil in your hand. Concentrate on listening to the piece. Try to make yourself aware of what is going on in your head as you hear the writer's prose. What do those words do to you? How do they strike you? When are you with the writer? At what point does your mind wander? What do you remember after the piece is finished?

2. In the time between the first and second readings, you might write down any first impressions you had. What words and phrases registered with you? What did you think and feel about what you heard? What do you want particularly to listen for during the second reading?

3. During the second reading, write continuously, noting down the thoughts, analyses, and impressions that are triggered in your mind by the piece. Try to comment on certain general elements such as organization, tone, voice, persuasiveness. Then move to particular words, phrases, images. Tell the writer your response to his or her words. Stick to your experience. What went on in your head as you heard the words read? What did you perceive?

4. Do not tell the writer what to do. Do not say, "Take out the first sentence." Say instead, "Your first sentence did not lead me into your essay" or "That first sentence bothered me because it made fun of houseboats; I'd like the piece better without it." Offer suggestions and support them with specific reasons as to why they work better. Offer your views, even if you do not always know why you are reacting that way (though you should keep trying to figure out the reason). You might say: "Your words made me angry. I hated it when you said . . ." You might say: "I loved that whole part where you . . ." You might say: "I disliked the voice in this essay. It struck me as condescending in that section on . . ." You might say: "I was really moved by the description of . . ." You might say: "I dislike the word 'utilize,' and so every time I heard it I wanted to hit it with a hammer." Whatever you say, always be honest and specific as to what you think and where, in the essay, that response occurred.